



Last Words of

THOMAS CARLYLE

ON TRADES-UNIONS

PROMOTERISM

AND

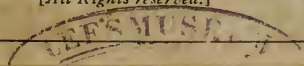
THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES

WILLIAM PATERSON

67 PRINCES STREET, EDINBURGH

1882

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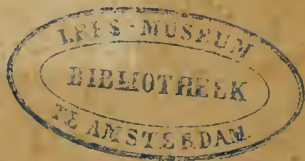


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PREFACE.

THIS "Latter-Day Pamphlet" may be called the great outline or index to The Literary Will and Testimony of THOMAS CARLYLE. It was written, at Chelsea, in the seriously obstructed handwriting of his 78th year, and bears date the 12th of July 1872, about which time the original MS. was presented to us by the Author. As it in other respects amply explains itself, further Preface does not appear to be necessary.

J. C. A.

EDINBURGH, *October* 1882.

ON TRADES-UNIONS,
ETC.

THE TRADES-UNIONS
of our day stand in
notable contrast to the
old Trades-Unions (called
Guilds) of former centuries.
Guilds were for quickening
the conscience of workmen,
teaching every workman

that it was not permitted him to think of doing his work ill ; that the “ *honour of a workman* ” and of all his brethren, consisted in faithful, skilful, and excellent delivery of work, and in never by any temptation debasing himself to work like a botcher, much less like a thief and knave. Trades-Unions again are avowedly for increase of

wages alone ; of thievery, knavery, botchery meeting in the work done, no account is had, or, if any, rather a preference shown for these sad qualities ! Guilds, therefore, we can define as tending *Heavenward* for all parties (namely towards discharge more and more perfect of the DUTIES one had undertaken) ; Trades-Unions as

tending Hellward (Downward let us say?) for all (that is, Towards getting more and more wages for work however done). Between men and masters, accordingly, never was such scandal of work *ill-done*, and never such perpetual battle about the ever-increasing *wages* to be demanded for it! A truly *infernal* position for

both parties (little understood or heeded as such, by either of them,—or by anybody almost but my poor self, yet hourly poisoning the soul of every one concerned with it);—out of which ineffable, if also for a time inevitable position all men might well pray, “Good Lord, deliver us soon!”—

Two days ago it first

struck me articulately,
That, till somebody (among
masters or men) re-
acquired and got a few
others to re-acquire the old
human detestation, shame
and abhorrence of WORK
ILL-DONE, and began to try
it with fixed determination
to do their little bit of
WORK well (whatever the
“wages” might be),—there
was no *punctum saliens* of

moral life in the affair at all, and no real improvement could begin. This is deeply and clearly my opinion ; though I cannot get it explained, or enforced any more ; and must leave it standing, for somebody that *has* still a *pen* and a *right hand*.—

Master-workers as the more “cultivated,” etc., might be looked to for

“initiating” in this all-vital matter; but will they? Or will work-*men* perhaps take the start of them? Tried with the true fidelity and heroism, either by Associated-Workmen, or by one rich Master trying to “associate” workmen, I am persuaded that the Public even now would patronise it. Most blessed of all the “*Trades-Unions*”

yet heard of! (12th July 1872).

My hope and prophecy used to be that instead of "Feudalism and Preservation of the Game," we shall have "Industrialism and Government by the Wisest:" and so, on the whole, I still firmly believe, no alternative except that, or "The Pit of Darkness for us All," be seeming

possible to me : But the *way thither* has many unexpected loops, lurchings, whirls, and windings ;— very many hitherto ; and who shall guess how many and how miserable in the unseen Generations yet ahead ! This of the new-sprung Sect of people, who are called “ Promoters,” well known in the City region just now, and spread-

ing there like a Tropical Hemlock-Forest, are the most hideous, huge and perilous-looking.

“Promoters” are gangs of Miscellaneous ill-employed Persons (perhaps in some loose way connected for mutual interest, on occasion into *one* general gang) whose trade is to devise seductive projects of companies for industrial

Enterprise. Enterprise,—calculated (infallibly) to yield a sure and rich return. The enterprises otherwise are of most various feature. Enterprise of every conceivable sort, in any quarter of the terraqueous globe ; but in this primary feature of rich and sure return to the adventurous shareholder they *all* agree. Their companies, too, be

it well observed, are all
“Companies (Limited),”
—no risk of serious *loss* to
you, should the very worst
come. These beautiful
“Companies (Limited),”
so soon as fairly born, and
got into some kind of
descriptive *long-clothes*, to
hide their nakedness, the
“Promoters” launch upon
a sinful stupid world: by
every effort of human cun-

ning and activity, especially by *un*-limited, incessant and omnipresent drumming and trumpeting (thro' the new Ha'penny Post), strive to blow up to the due bulk of plausibility, and popularity real or seeming, —till if humanly possible shares rise to *par*, or a premium ; whereupon instantly the Promoters *realize* their own £10,000

of said shares, and walk silently victorious, out of that adventure, thanking Heaven, or the "Other Place:" all this if humanly possible. If not humanly possible, of course they have to vanish on other terms and the adventure with them. Needful only to recognise in time that your bellows - power is inadequate, that your wind-

bag of an adventure does not fill.

The “ Limited Liability Act ” (rescinding of the ancient human Act on that subject,—which would cost any Ministry its life in a day to attempt re-rescinding) this, which after long travail, the respected Womb of Chaos bore us about ten years ago, may be taken as the first visible

development of the thing, creative *fiat* for it, or open permission to exist: short while after which there began to be cheerfully noticed “*a sensible increase of briskness in business,*” of industrial and commercial adventure, and, in short, of “*unexampled prosperity ;*” culminating at the due time in Overend Gurney Bankruptcies (of Eleven

Millions odd), Chatham and Dover Railways, general collapse of mendacity and madness, and such abomination of Desolation as is certain to ensue thereupon in a world not made originally by Beelzebub and Co., but by Another, and where Lying and Cheating are not permitted at all!—After lying on the rot-heap, for several years, scraping

itself with potsherds (worse than ever Job), making woful wail to Heaven and Earth, the Commercial-World struggled to its feet again, declared itself still alive, nay livelier than ever, and again experiencing “*unexampléd prosperity,*” as never before; “*not in pulses and gradually, but in gushes and large leaps!*” A plainly unexampléd

Commercial - World ! It is since this last resurrection into life and glory, of the miraculous Commercial - World, that the hitherto dim though long active Genius of PROMOTERISM has burst forth (new Ha'penny Post so aiding withal) as a Winged Genius, and become universally conspicuous [become a thing that knocks

at every door, insists on visiting your hearth, your business, and almost your bosom and brain; and forces even so wayworn, weary and silent a creature as myself to ask it—
“What in the name of wonder, then, art thou?”]
For about a twelvemonth past, there have arrived by post here, as everywhere (if the luckless shareholder

ever invested a few spare pounds in any kind of public stock), on a weekly average, ten or more flaming Proposals, to make Aqueducts for Towns in South America, Railways in Patagonia, or Æthiopia, to work, or “salt,” Tin-Mines in Hungary, Gold-Mines, Silver-Mines elsewhere, almost everywhere, all certain enough to

succeed if only you dare venture. And sometimes three or four of them hitting you on the same day. Vain that you get to know these impudent post missiles by face, impatiently twist them together, and burn unopened; Promoters are aware of that tendency, and show uncommon skill in varying face and outer vesture; and as one sure

point they keep unweariedly emitting, thro' the Ha'penny Post, with a profusion that knows no bounds ; hoping always that somebody may read at least the first line before burning. Not long ago an accurate and mournfully authentic official from the Post Office (apologising for some mistake in the deliveries here) informed

me that there was one House in the City, which sometimes poured in upon them 28,000 Promoters - Circulars for one Post, and 28,000 at one discharge from one single House : figure such a thing ! So that Promoterism has now of a verity been born, the most gigantic *Sooterkin* ever seen.

With amazement and a

shade of terror, I perceive it is the Avatar or fated coming - in upon us of General Commercial Gambling. The sober arithmetical Counting-house of Trade to become a *Rouge et Noir* Table, presided over, not by Merchant-Princes but by Hungry Scoundrels. Substitution more and more, in all Industrialism and Human

Industries, of blind unlimited audacity, reckless dishonesty and covetousness greedy as the grave, for rigorous probity, first of all ; for caution, prudence, moderation, and the other human faculties and noblenesses, by which and by which alone, “success” in trade, or success in anything whatever, has hitherto been found attainable, Pro-

moterism tells us : “ Yes, yes ; but we have changed all that ! ” “ *nous avons changè tout cela !* ” Who knows ? If Atheism be the real religion and Last Gospel of Mankind ; if right and wrong be mere association of Ideas ; and the true Beginning of us a kind of Blubber, or Proto-plasm (which the Nettles also have in common) ; if

we all were at one time Apes and even Oysters, and animalcules, who (chiefly by judicious choice in marriage it appears) rose to this stupendous pitch of humanhood and civilization,—may not, to a poor necessitous Promoter, this peculiar Life-theory of his, with the like Life-praxis superadded, be truly the natural one? Whether in

his meditative moments, if he ever have any, he reflects farther : If our stupendous Progress be not perhaps stopping, turning on its heel again, and gradually carrying us (that is Promotive Mankind) *back* to the state of Apehood, Jackalhood, and pure Blubber once more ? (I have not observed that wisdom of choice in regard

to marriage was on the increase of late!) This is a deliberate Theory of Human Enterprise, never heard of before, not even anywhere in Bedlam, I believe; and it is running the streets as a Practicality at the above rate (of 28,000 by one post) in these new days.

I have often fancied how my friend Friederich Wil-

helm I. would have dealt with one of those flaming circulars, had it fallen into his hand. To send for the Promoter, have him instantly produced in person : “ Look me straight in the face, Sirrah (*Erblicke mich gerade an !*) Let me know with exactitude what you know of this Hungarian Tin-mine, this Aqueduct for Æthiopia

which are so promising?
Nothing? You own to
knowing nothing whatever
of them ; beyond their
capabilities for gambling-
purposes? You are but
a mean Touter for the
World's-Gambling-House,
then? Disappear (under
the Proper Officer); take
forty stripes save one for
this your first feat in that
line ; if you ever try a

second, remember that we have a gallows in this country ! ” — “ Lucky country, long may you enjoy that luxury ! ” — ejaculates with bland satire, the British Promoter, when he reads of such a thing, and jocund of heart gets ready his new issue of Circulars, 28,000 peals of the touting-trumpet at a single heat. For there is still an Energy

at least of Hunger in the British Soul (or *Stomach* as the word more properly is) that approaches the stupendous, and in that career will do quasi-miracles.

It is too clear, from the now prevailing nearly universal temper of mankind, and in such a British Anarchy, Kinglessness weltering daily deeper down

to the Bottomless, this of Promoterism will spread to great breadths, and heights, will by no means disappear shortly by natural or other death; but will spread and flourish to immense breadths and heights, more and more covering (and poisoning) the whole field of Commerce. For it means the conversion of Human

Commerce and Enterprise, which is Heaven's Eternal mandate upon man, into ardent Gambling, which is the Devil's mandate, and may be called ardent with the mere flames of Hell ! Die out of itself this thing will not. And in a poor, gold - nuggeted, plethoric, and utterly destitute and helpless Britain, with its very Gallows gone to the

dogs, is there any chance of somebody's arising with power and will to foot-shackle it, never to speak of hanging and extinguishing it? Not any chance whatever. Let us expect to see noble commerce then become yearly more and more ignoble, black-guard, and accursed *Rouge et Noir*, played on a scale ever more transcendent

and world-wide,—with such effects on Wages of labor, trades-unionism, social mutiny, pointing ultimately to Petroleum itself, as everybody can anticipate?

What a frightful bend-sinister (or abysmal *gash-sinister*) on our poor Prophecy of Industrialism marching irresistibly towards government by the

Noblest! Has come upon us by surprise even; no such anticipation till in such form the weird Thing (blowing by the 28,000 ?!) is *here*. [“ Put Capital into the hands of Government — Alas, what is Government ? ” — General reformation of ourselves,— which nobody will believe in.]

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